



ROBERT GALBREATH PHOTO

Gov. Mark Gordon, left, meets members of the Sublette County Hospital District's nursing staff. Pictured, from left, are Vickey Marshall, director of nursing; Patti Ellis, RN; and Shelbi Streiff, RN.

Governor: Hospital is 'great anchor' for community

By Robert Galbreath, rgalbreath@subletteexaminer.com

SUBLETTE COUNTY – Gov. Mark Gordon expressed optimism for the future of health care in Sublette County during a visit to the Pinedale Clinic on Thursday, July 15.

The governor examined architectural renderings for the new critical access hospital and long-term care facility slated for construction on the hill next to the Pinedale Clinic before taking a guided tour and meeting providers and staff.

The decades-long process to build a hospital in Sublette County became a reality when the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) approved a \$32-million loan application submitted by the Sublette County Hospital District to build a hospital on June 28.

“When I was (state) treasurer back in 2012, I had people visiting my office saying we need to get (the critical access hospital) done,” Gordon told the Examiner. “It’s taken awhile and here we are. This is great and exciting.”

Gordon credited cooperation between the SCHD, local entities and the wider community for bringing the hospital project a step closer to fruition.

“I think a lot of people have put quite a bit of thought into the project,” he said.

“Whenever a community makes a decision like this, there is a lot of weighing back and forth and dialogue that happens. It makes the proposal better.”

Gov. Gordon acknowledged the crucial and time-consuming work that went into preparing the USDA application.

“Making sure the project is financially stable is not an easy task to do,” he said. “Affiliating with the Star Valley hospital system gives everybody a little more comfort that this is going to be a sustainable, viable hospital in the future.”

A new model for medicine

Gov. Gordon recognized the potential for a hospital in Sublette County to provide expanded services at a local level and called the project a “new model for medicine.”

“Wyoming is being nibbled away at from neighboring states,” he told the Examiner. “We have clinics and hospitals being

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bought up and affiliated with (other entities). For the people of Wyoming, that becomes a challenge for medical care because you have to travel somewhere else, put yourself up in a hotel. We all know how much inflation is hurting everybody’s pocket these days.”

“If you’re going to have economic development, if you’re going to hold the core of a community together and make it attractive, you need medical care,” he said. “As we see people wanting to relocate businesses to places like Wyoming, a hospital just makes Pinedale and Sublette County much, much more attractive.”

During the governor’s visit, Mike Hunsaker, chief operating officer for the SCHD and its managing partner, Star Valley Health, thanked the Sublette County Board of Commissioners for its support in the project.

In February 2020, the commissioners pledged up to \$20 million to replace the aging Sublette Center with a new facility. The intent of the commissioners’ motion was to encourage an agreement between the SCHD and Sublette Center to place care under one umbrella.

Commissioner Tom Noble credited a series of workshops in 2020 for “bringing the county together.”

The meetings were organized by the county, Sublette County Rural Health Care District, Sublette Center and former Examiner editor Holly Dabb and moderated by Dr. Bernadine Craft.

The ability to keep a patient close to home, near family and friends, improves medical outcomes, Gordon added. This is particularly true during Wyoming’s harsh winters when traveling to a hospital 100 miles away can be a life or death journey.

“Putting somebody in a helicopter or fixed-wing to try to fly them somewhere in bad weather conditions puts everyone at risk,” Gordon said. “Having a facility like this is going to be a great anchor for the community.”

The presence of a hospital will boost the local economy, Gordon explained.

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